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## The “Asylum Seekers Crisis” in Tornio in 2015 as Conveyed by Finnish Newspapers

### Introduction

This article analyzes the treatment of the so-called “asylum seekers crisis” or “refugee crisis” in the autumn of 2015 in Finnish newspapers, particularly from the perspective of how, according to the papers, events progressed in Tornio. I use the term “crisis” here because in the Finnish public, the subject was generally described using exactly that term. For example, Esther Greussing and Hajo G. Boomgaarden have commented that the use of quotation marks is necessary because it is primarily a crisis born or created at a mental image level.<sup>1</sup> The goal is not to claim that asylum seekers would have caused an absolute crisis in Finland comparable to the conditions in the homeland for a number of asylum seekers.

An analysis of coverage regarding the situation in Tornio is justified due to the fact that in the early autumn of 2015, Tornio became by far the busiest center for asylum seekers in Finland. More than 95% of asylum seekers in Finland in September and October entered the country via Tornio. During this time, the city gained the particular attention of the Finnish media, and the presence of a large number of asylum seekers was reflected in many ways in the local life of the city. In this article, I mainly use the term “asylum seeker”. It should be noted, however, that the terms “refugees” and “asylum seekers” were almost always used as synonyms in the press, without due consideration or even including a definition of their related content. Legally speaking, the two are quite different groups, but in everyday language we do not usually distinguish between them. When the term “refugee” appears in an article, it refers to the term that is commonly used in a given newspaper article or the news.

This analysis explores how actively the papers covered the situation in Tornio, which themes they paid attention to, and what tones they used in describing events. Ultimately, this analysis explores why the coverage in each paper was a certain type. The newspapers are compared to each other to determine their similarities and differences in content. This analysis also identifies what kinds of changes occurred in

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<sup>1</sup> Esther Greussing & Hajo G. Boomgaarden, “Shifting the refugee narrative? An automated frame analysis of Europe’s 2015 refugee crisis”. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 43:11 (2017), 1764. See also Annastiina Kallius, Daniel Monterescu & Prem Kumar Rajaram, “Immobilizing mobility: Border ethnography, illiberal democracy, and the politics of the “refugee crisis” in Hungary”. *American Ethnologist*. Vol. 43, No 1 (2016), 27.

coverage and why. The time frame examined spans the most intensive phase of the asylum seekers crisis, from the beginning August to the end of November 2015. In regards to the number of arrivals, these four months were clearly the busiest of the year, as approximately 27,000 or just over 80% of the yearly total of asylum seekers arrived during this time<sup>2</sup>.

This analysis focuses on three newspapers: the Pohjolan Sanomat, the Helsingin Sanomat and the Ilta-Sanomat. The Pohjolan Sanomat is the predominant paper in the Tornio area and in this analysis it represents the perspective of the local media. The Helsingin Sanomat is by far Finland's most widely read traditional daily newspaper, which is read extensively throughout the country. In this analysis, the Helsingin Sanomat can be regarded as representative of a national perspective, which reflects Finland's south-centered demographic and social center of gravity. The Ilta-Sanomat also has a southern emphasis and a national circulation and is at the same time Finland's largest tabloid newspaper<sup>3</sup>. Thus, as a representative of the so-called yellow press, the Ilta-Sanomat provides a point of comparison in this analysis into a slightly different journalistic culture.

In the autumn of 2015, the Helsingin Sanomat appeared seven days a week, the Ilta-Sanomat six, and the Pohjolan Sanomat five. There are also slight differences in the average number of pages, resulting in the same order, which is the Helsingin Sanomat had more pages on average and the Pohjolan Sanomat the least. This analysis considers all of the different forms of writing (editorials, articles, columns, news and letters of opinion), in which case it is possible to form an overall impression of how the asylum seekers theme appeared to readers. At the same time, it can be concluded that all of the published material, regardless of the author, reveals something about the editorial choices of the newspaper. Whether a text was created by editors themselves, selected from a news agencies, written by outside columnists or by readers of the paper, ultimately, the editorial staff decide what is published at the paper.

All the papers analyzed in this study were politically independent, but their editorial staff had, as people generally have, a wide range of sympathies and antipathies. These values and opinions, which reflect worldviews, can for example be related to whether or not there is support for increasing or decreasing social regulation, preserving the status quo or adopting change, or uniformity or plurality. All three of these papers allow different perspectives to be presented in the papers, but the emphases of the editorial staff are still quite apparent. The traditional view of newspapers is that they, in particular those that are independent, should above all

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<sup>2</sup> *Turvapaikanhakijat 1.1.–31.12.2015*. Maahanmuuttovirasto. [http://www.migri.fi/download/64990\\_Tp-hakijat\\_2015.pdf?fd3c69604dcad388](http://www.migri.fi/download/64990_Tp-hakijat_2015.pdf?fd3c69604dcad388)

<sup>3</sup> *Levikkitilasto LT2015*. <http://mediaauditfinland.fi/levikit/tilastot/>

attempt to be as objective as possible in relaying information<sup>4</sup>. However, it is an open question as to how this kind of objectivity or “truth” is generally achievable, and to what extent individual editors or editors as a collective even strive to attain it.

It can be assumed that in addition to transmitting knowledge the editorial staff of the papers were trying to strike a balance between their objectives and responding to the expectations of readers. The existence of newspapers is based on their popularity and a willingness to pay for them, therefore in creating the content of a paper one must try to meet the presumed expectations of the customer. This affects the choice and treatment of the topics published. Newspapers must also attempt to stand out from their competitors in a positive way, and the means for achieving this may vary. Some may attempt to profile reliable journalism and others may construct emotion provoking dramas. On the other hand, editorial staff do not only create pleasant and attractive contents for paying readers that reinforces already existing opinions and attitudes among the target audience. At the same time, editorial staff attempt to influence their readers and through them, the wider society<sup>5</sup>. In doing so, readers must be challenged to some extent by providing material which is not necessarily consistent with their existing attitudes and opinions. In this sense, no audience of any paper is completely homogenous, and pleasing everybody at the same time is not possible. In this case, polyphony may be a conscious and practical choice to reach a wide audience.

In this study, I systematically examined all the material published in three newspapers from 1 August to 30 November 2015. All the news and images related to Tornio and asylum seekers were gathered, calculated and organized according to the themes mentioned in the different writings. A quantitative analysis shows how much that was related to the topic was published overall. The three newspapers were compared to each other, and the background factors’ analyzed to explain the differences between the newspapers and the changes in actual writing activity during that autumn. The qualitative analysis examined the different writings published in each newspaper (editorials, columns, news, and letters from readers) and analyzed which issues drew the most attention and what was their tone in the papers. In the analysis I focused on reflecting on the writing goals and other background factors, and the newspapers were again compared to each other. A critical content analysis of the sources is complemented by an analysis of both the discursive and rhetorical methods used in these newspapers.

There has now been research undertaken on the treatment of the 2015 European “refugee crisis” in the European media. In almost all of these studies, the

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<sup>4</sup> Anders Hanse, Simon Cottle, Ralph Negrine & Chris Newbold, *Mass Communication Research Methods*. Macmillan Press, Houndmills 2003, 18–19; Elisa Juholin & Heikki Kuutti, *Mediapeli – anatomia ja keinot*. Inforviestintä, Helsinki 2003, 11.

<sup>5</sup> Juholin & Kuutti 2003, 17–27; John Street, *Mass Media, Politics & Democracy*. Palgrave Macmillan, Houndmills 2011, 46–58.

methodology searched for certain specific terms in newspapers or on social media. Thus, it is possible to draw conclusions on key themes and how the treatment of the asylum seekers issue rested on the positive–neutral–negative axis. The most important benchmarks for this article are the surveys that were specifically aimed at the newspaper. Greussing and Boomgaarden studied the Austrian press, while Stergios Fotopoulos and Margarita Kaimaklioti examined the Greek, German, and British press. Marta Szczepanik primarily analyzed the illustrations and headlines in British newspapers.<sup>6</sup> There are also studies that focused on social media discussions and public speeches made by politicians, for example, on Twitter.<sup>7</sup> The Finnish reference material is provided by Rebekka Kuikka, who explored the news in Kaleva (newspaper) in the autumn of 2015.<sup>8</sup>

In addition, there is some existing research that has examined attitudes of the Finnish media toward asylum seekers on a general level. These and a number of case studies have mainly focused on relatively recent events from the 1980s to the early 2000s. The Helsingin Sanomat has often been used as a source, as is the case in Sari Pietikäinen’s dissertation, which examines the coverage of the Helsingin Sanomat in regards to minorities in general during the years 1985–1993.<sup>9</sup> Karina Horsti’s and Camilla Haavisto’s methodologically diverse dissertations examine the topic from a

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<sup>6</sup> Greussing & Boomgaarden 2017, 1749–1774; Stergios Fotopoulos & Margarita Kaimaklioti, “Media discourse on the refugee crisis: on what have the Greek, German and British press focused?” *European View* 15 (2016), 265–279; Marta Szczepanik, “The ‘Good’ and ‘Bad’ Refugees? Imagined Refugeehood(s) in the Media Coverage of the Migration Crisis”. *Journal of Identity and Migration Studies*. Vol. 10, No 2 (2016), 23–33.

<sup>7</sup> Michal Krzyzanowski, “Discursive Shifts in Ethno-Nationalist Politics: On Politicization and Mediatization of the “Refugee Crisis” in Poland”. *Journal of Immigrant & Refugee Studies*. Vol 16, NOS. 1–2 (2018), 76–96; Salomi Boukala & Dimitra Dimitrakopoulou, “Absurdity and the “Blame Game” Within the Schengen Area: Analyzing Greek (Social) Media Discourses on the Refugee Crisis”. *Journal of Immigrant & Refugee Studies*. Vol 16, NOS. 1–2 (2018), 179–197; Anna Triandafyllidou, “A “Refugee Crisis” Unfolding: “Real” Events and Their Interpretation in Media and Political Debates”. *Journal of Immigrant & Refugee Studies*. Vol 16, NOS. 1–2 (2018), 198–216; Lilie Chouliaraki & Rafal Zaborowski, “Voice and community in the 2015 refugee crisis: a content analysis of news coverage in eight European countries”. *International Communication Gazette* 2017 (6–7), 613–635; Lilie Chouliaraki & Tijana Stolic, “Rethinking media responsibility in the refugee ‘crisis’: a visual typology of European news”. *Media, Culture and Society* 39 (8) (2017), 1162–1177.

<sup>8</sup> Rebekka Kuikka, *Turvapaikanhakijat Oulussa – vuoden 2015 pakolaiskriisi sanomalehti Kalevan uutisoinnissa*. Pro gradu -tutkielma. Luonnontieteellinen tiedekunta. Maantieteen laitos. Oulun yliopisto 2017.

<sup>9</sup> Sari Pietikäinen, *Discourses of Differentiation. Ethnic Representations in Newspaper Texts*. Jyväskylä Studies in Communication 12. Jyväskylän yliopisto, Jyväskylä 2000.

broader perspective.<sup>10</sup> Each of these utilizes a framing and/or positioning analysis, in other words they examine how specific groups of people are characterized and contextualized in the text. This perspective is very close to discourse analysis. Previous studies will be discussed, when applicable, in more detail later in this analysis.

This theme is also socially important. Ethnic relations, to which area the asylum seekers issue belongs, are one of the basic elements of human societies and a particularly relevant theme in Finland. In late 2015 the asylum seekers issue proved to be one of the central interests and concerns that arose in the minds of Finns. The great amount of attention given to the asylum seekers theme in the Finnish media reveals the same. Finland’s asylum seekers issue (or asylum seekers crisis) was one of the most covered chain of events relating to Finland among the international media in 2015.<sup>11</sup> An analysis of coverage in the Finnish press deepens understandings of the structure of ethnic relations in Finland and more specifically, helps to understand how and why the image conveyed to the public in regards to this theme is in some ways heterogeneous and open to interpretation.

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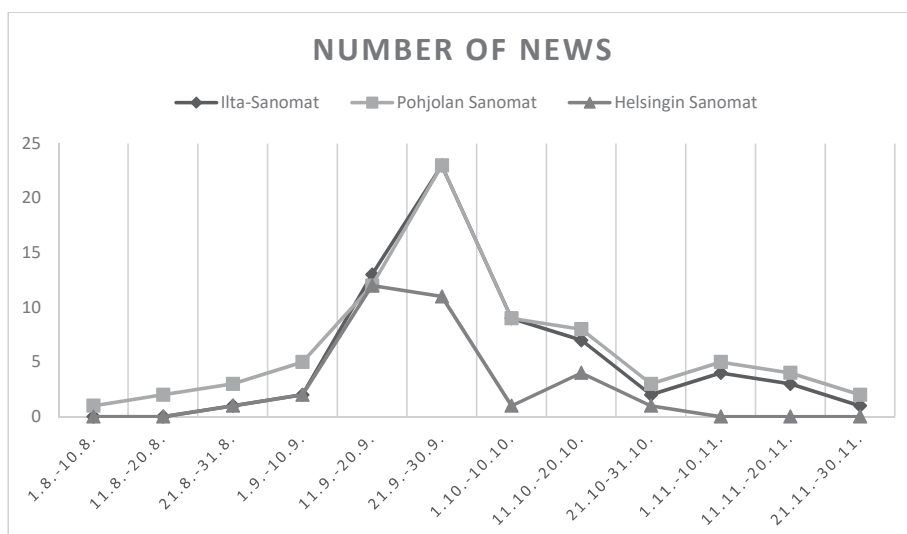
<sup>10</sup> Karina Horsti, *Vierauden rajat. Monikulttuurisuus ja turvapaikanhakijat journalismissa*. Acta Electronica Universitatis Tamperensis 471. Tampereen yliopisto, Tampere 2005; Camilla Haavisto, *Conditionally One of 'Us'. A Study of Print Media, Minorities and Positioning Practices*. SSKH Skrifter 30. University of Helsinki, Helsinki 2011.

<sup>11</sup> *Suomi maailman mediassa. Ulkoministeriön kooste vuodesta 2015*. <http://www.ulkoasiainministerio.fi/public/default.aspx?contentid=346039&contentlan=1&culture=fi-FI>

## Quantitative analysis

The table below illustrates the total number of articles written concerning the asylum seekers theme in Tornio from the beginning of August to the end of November, and their distribution on a monthly basis in each newspaper. The lower table graphically illustrates a more specific distribution of the intensity of news coverage in ten-day periods within the same overall period. Certain similarities and differences between the newspapers are apparent in each.

	August	September	October	November	Σ
Pohjolan Sanomat	6	40	20	11	77
Ilta-Sanomat	1	38	18	8	65
Helsingin Sanomat	1	25	6	0	32



The total amount of coverage was greatest in the Pohjolan Sanomat (PS) during the months examined and during the four-month period. In relative terms, its level of coverage is slightly greater when the lower frequency of publication and number of pages are taken into account. In any case, the amount of coverage in the Pohjolan Sanomat is logical, as it was a local paper in the Tornio area. Although the arrival of asylum seekers in Tornio was an issue that awoke interest throughout Finland, the local context naturally made the issue more relevant for the PS. The Pohjolan Sanomat wanted to publish detailed and regular reports on the phenomenon, as the arrival of asylum seekers was clearly evident in the life of Tornio and no doubt

interested residents of the Tornio area more than it did residents elsewhere in Finland. The significance of the local perspective was more apparent in August and early September when the arrival of asylum seekers in Tornio had not yet exceeded the threshold for national news. During this time, the PS already had already published a dozen different news pieces and letters of opinion, while the other papers only mentioned in brief that a reception center for asylum seekers had been established in Tornio.

The threshold for national news was exceeded during the second week of September, when the number of asylum seekers began to rise sharply. During September almost 11,000 asylum seekers arrived in Finland, while in August there had only been 3,000 of them.<sup>12</sup> Following these developments, the coverage in all three newspapers multiplied around mid-September. In the Pohjolan Sanomat and Ilta-Sanomat (IS), the amount of coverage doubled at the end of the month and reached its peak at this time. In practice, in mid-September these papers published a daily average of one article relating to the asylum seekers crisis in Tornio and at the end of September, two or even three articles per day. In the Helsingin Sanomat (HS), the amount of coverage at the end of September remained at the peak level to which it had quickly risen mid-month, but unlike in the other papers, the amount of content did not increase any more.

In early October, the amount of coverage in the PS and IS decreased noticeably, but remained at the same levels as in mid-September. From then on, there was a slow decreasing trend, and by the end of October the amount of coverage equaled that of early September. By the end of November the amount of coverage had decreased and was rather random, in practice equaling at the most one or two articles per week in each newspaper. Trends in the amount of coverage in the PS and IS are almost identical and fairly close to a normal distribution. Thus, we can include that the asylum seekers crisis in Tornio was a fairly typical news event, which initially attracted interest and resulted in a quick rise in the amount of coverage. After its culmination, when the news value of events were no longer as great and the issue had been covered from many perspectives, the amount of coverage began to decrease fairly rapidly<sup>13</sup>. This decrease was clearly faster than the decrease in the number of asylum seekers (October: approximately 7,000; November: still nearly 6,000)<sup>14</sup>. As the phenomenon continued to be fairly intense and was largely unchanged, the amount of coverage did not collapse. Developments in events were followed and reported on and commentary brought out complementary perspectives. The quantitative development of the Finnish press debate closely resembles that in the

<sup>12</sup> *Turvapaikanhakijat 1.1.–31.12.2015*. Maahanmuuttovirasto. [http://www.migri.fi/download/64990\\_Tp-hakijat\\_2015.pdf?fd3c69604dcad388](http://www.migri.fi/download/64990_Tp-hakijat_2015.pdf?fd3c69604dcad388)

<sup>13</sup> Juholin & Kuutti 2003, 70–72. See also Horsti 2005, 125.

<sup>14</sup> *Turvapaikanhakijat 1.1.–31.12.2015*. Maahanmuuttovirasto. [http://www.migri.fi/download/64990\\_Tp-hakijat\\_2015.pdf?fd3c69604dcad388](http://www.migri.fi/download/64990_Tp-hakijat_2015.pdf?fd3c69604dcad388)

Austrian media<sup>15</sup>. In Austria as well the peak in this writing occurred in the second half of September, and the reasons were also similar: A strong growth culminated in the numbers of asylum seekers and the changes in the news value of the event reflected that change during the summer and autumn.

During the four-month period, the active coverage of the Helsingin Sanomat was approximately half of that of the Ilta-Sanomat, and the difference with the Pohjolan Sanomat was even greater, particularly if frequency and number of pages of coverage in the papers are considered. The amount of coverage in the Helsingin Sanomat equaled that of the other two papers only momentarily, when the situation in Tornio became the number one national news story in mid-September. Otherwise, the active coverage of the HS was clearly lower when examined on a monthly basis or in ten-day periods. In practice, the interest of the HS in the issue already waned in mid-October: the last commentary concerning the situation in Tornio appeared on 15 September. After this, Tornio was mentioned only in brief two times during the latter half of October in news pieces that were otherwise related to asylum seekers, and in November the issue did not arise at all in the columns of the paper.

At the end of October and in November the Helsingin Sanomat continued to publish material relating to asylum seekers that had come to Finland, but in these articles the perspective was general or related to the situation in southern Finland. This was essentially the same case as with the Pohjolan Sanomat, in other words each newspaper catered to the needs of readers in the circulation area, and reported on local events – in the case of the HS, particularly on the situation in the metropolitan area. After the intensive phase during September and early October, the events in Tornio no longer appeared interesting enough to the editorial staff of the HS, particularly when the number of asylum seekers decreased and the situation in Tornio stabilized.

### **The Pohjolan Sanomat: A desire to assist, manage the crisis and balance between differing views**

In comparing the Pohjolan Sanomat, the Helsingin Sanomat and the Ilta-Sanomat, three differing stories take shape regarding the situation in Tornio. As noted above, coverage in the Pohjolan Sanomat was the most active, and additionally, it described events in greater detail. At the same time, the PS described the situation more comprehensively, in other words the newspaper gave more space to contradictory perspectives and views. The focus in coverage changed with the course of events, and four different phases are apparent.

The first phase occurred during August and early September. The rapid increase in the number of asylum seekers in comparison to the spring and early summer gained

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<sup>15</sup> Greussing & Boomgaarden 2017, 1759–1761.



the attention of the editorial staff of the Pohjolan Sanomat and they began to follow developments. During this stage, the increasing number of asylum seekers was reported on, and how this produced challenges for the authorities in accommodating the arrivals<sup>16</sup>. Although the demand and congestion in organizing services was mentioned, the editorial staff of the PS wanted to present the overall situation in Tornio in a positive light<sup>17</sup>. Articles written by the editorial staff of the newspaper emphasized that the arrival of asylum seekers had resulted in a great desire to help among the locals, and reports described how a variety of relief supplies had been brought for the arrivals and that many people had come forward to volunteer their assistance<sup>18</sup>. An editorial written by the editor Annemari Kallio titled “Welcome to our backyard”<sup>19</sup>, summarized the position taken by the editorial staff during this first phase. The photos chosen for the paper supported the creation of this positive image: close-ups photos only included smiling asylum seekers and happy volunteers working in the reception centers<sup>20</sup>. The concern and confusion experienced by some Tornio residents regarding the new situation was only apparent in a few letters of opinion<sup>21</sup>.

With the approach of mid-September, the number of asylum seekers arriving in Tornio increased dramatically: instead of the 100–200 arrivals at the beginning of the month, on the busiest days there were 400–800 arrivals. In addition, it was impossible to estimate how much the numbers might still increase, as the number of arrivals was also dramatically increasing in southern Europe, from where people were migrating towards the north. It appears that the change in circumstances also brought about a temporary change of attitude among the editorial staff of the Pohjolan Sanomat. During the second week of September, articles emphasizing a sympathetic and positive attitude toward the arrivals disappeared and were replaced by articles reflecting concern and uncertainty<sup>22</sup>. The term “tide of refugees” became the norm in headlines and articles. Exactly the same term was used at the same time in other European media as well.<sup>23</sup> On September 13 the headline of the top story read “Bus station teeming with refugees”<sup>24</sup>, in other words the situation was visualized as equivalent to a natural phenomenon such as a flood or horde of insects. Several

<sup>16</sup> ”Kemin vastaanottokeskus saa lisää tilaa Tornioista”, PS 5.8.2015; ”Vastaanottokeskus aloittaa Torniossa elo-syyskuussa”, PS 12.8.2015; ”SPR: Lappi tarvitsee uuden vastaanottokeskuksen”, PS 26.8.2015.

<sup>17</sup> For similar initial attitudes in Kaleva, see Kuikka 2016, 31–38.

<sup>18</sup> ”Tuvat täynnä hakijoita”, PS 26.8.2015; ”Lapista löytyy intoa auttaa”, PS 1.9.2015; ”Ihmisillä on herännyt halu auttaa”, PS 4.9.2015.

<sup>19</sup> ”Tervetuloa takapihallemme”, PS 26.8.2015.

<sup>20</sup> PS 26.8.2015; PS 1.9.2015; PS 4.9.2015; PS 8.9.2015.

<sup>21</sup> ”Tornion vastaanottokeskuksesta”, PS 19.8.2015; ”Maaailma tuli Tornioon”, PS 7.9.2015.

<sup>22</sup> Concerning similar changes in Kaleva’s attitude, see Kuikka 2016, 39–44, 52–53.

<sup>23</sup> Greussing & Boomgaarden 2017, 1751; Fotopoulos & Kaimaklioti 2016, 273.

<sup>24</sup> ”Linja-autoasema kuhisi pakolaisia”, PS 13.9.2015.

articles produced by the editorial staff also discussed “uncontrolled immigration” and the need to get the situation under control<sup>25</sup>.

During the second and third weeks of September the PS adopted the perspective and policy of authorities in its published articles, which can be described as a need to restore order<sup>26</sup>. News and other articles reported on the establishment of a registration center for asylum seekers in Tornio by the government and the city of Tornio. The center specifically served to keep the situation under control, in other words it registered arrivals and ensured that arrivals were not able to journey to other parts of Finland without being registered. Articles clearly expressed support for these operations. At the same time, they detailed how the border control, police and defense forces regarded the situation and how authorities supported each other in restoring order. Byproducts of the situation also appeared, above all the organization of illegal immigration, in some cases in which the authorities uncovered and arrested the people involved<sup>27</sup>. According to the front page news published on September 19, chaos had been feared, but the effective actions of the authorities had managed to prevent this<sup>28</sup>. However, concerns over a worsening of the situation were not yet calmed, and for the next week the “tide of refugees” was discussed, and among other things, the possibility of closing the border completely.

Pictures in the paper supported attempts to convey the changed attitudes of the second phase to readers. From the close-ups used in portraying smiling individuals in the initial stage, more distance was taken in portraying group images, which emphasized the volume of the arrivals and their anonymity. Pictures of Finnish volunteers were replaced with pictures of serious looking police officers and soldiers monitoring and controlling the situation<sup>29</sup>, and according to the news headline of September 16, performing “effective surveillance”<sup>30</sup>. The overall impression conveyed by the photos was, like the text, a serious and concerned one. The published images were also similar to those of Europe in general, especially when the number of asylum seekers was at its highest.<sup>31</sup>

Critical tones that had intensified among local residents also gained the understanding of the editorial staff of the PS. On September 18 when upcoming protests over “uncontrolled immigration” in Tornio and Kemi were mentioned, it

<sup>25</sup> ”Pakolaisvirta länsirajan yli jatkuu”, PS 12.9.2015; ”Ministeri Mäntylä: Talous ei kestä hakijamäärien kasvua”, PS 12.9.2015; ”Pakolaisvirta”, PS 15.9.2015.

<sup>26</sup> Compare with Horsti 2005, 124–127, concerning the Finnish media and the Slovak Roma question in 2002.

<sup>27</sup> ”Turvapaikanhakijoiden järjestelykeskus Tornioon”, PS 18.9.2015; ”Tilat Lappiasta viikonlopun ajaksi”, PS 18.9.2015; ”Kymmeniä poliiseja lähetetään rajalle”, PS 19.9.2015.

<sup>28</sup> ”Pakolaisvirta jatkui tasaisena”, PS 19.9.2015.

<sup>29</sup> PS 22.9.2015; PS 23.9.2015; PS 24.9.2015; PS 25.9.2015.

<sup>30</sup> ”Turvapaikanhakijat tehovalvontaan rajalla”, PS 16.9.2015.

<sup>31</sup> For similar illustrations elsewhere in Europe, see, for instance Szczepanik 2016, 24–26; Chouliaraki & Stolic 2017, 1162–1177.

was considered prudent to mention in the headline that “there was no knowledge of counter-demonstrations”<sup>32</sup>. Perhaps this notice alluded to the fact that the demonstration presumably reflected the views of the general public, and there was no reason to demonstrate opposing views, as this would support “uncontrolled immigration”. Sympathy towards the arrivals did not completely disappear from the pages of the PS, but the tone was quite different from a few weeks earlier. On September 19 the headline on the front page expressed a particular kind of fatigue with the subject: “Refugees. We are compelled to help these people”<sup>33</sup>.

In late September, it was apparent that the Tornio registration center was working well and that the situation was to a large extent under control. On the other hand, there was once again a great number of arrivals, 300–500 people per day, which resulted in constant a congestion of the registration process, overworked authorities and a shortage of accommodation facilities. The editorial staff of the Pohjolan Sanomat reported on events in detail every day, discussing the challenges presented by the “tide” or sometimes the “flood” of refugees. The arrests of smugglers at the border as well as a few other incidents were also reported. Demonstrations in Tornio calling for the closure of the borders also received plenty of space, including photos<sup>34</sup>.

Although a concerned undertone discussing problems remained in the coverage of the PS, the period from the end of September extending to the middle of October forms a third, slightly different phase in the coverage of the paper. Apparently, the editorial staff of the paper had recovered from the shock caused by the “flood of refugees” during the last few weeks and they once again began to bring out positive aspects, as the situation seem to be reasonably well organized and was not heading in a threatening, uncontrolled direction. The PS now published articles discussing how the asylum seekers were doing their shopping and in doing so improving the situation for retail and transport companies (buses, taxis) in the Tornio area<sup>35</sup>. The newspaper also attempted to combat rumors that were critical of asylum seekers: for example, on October 1 it was reported that “in contrast to the rumors that were circulating around Tornio”, the emergency accommodations that had been arranged for asylum seekers in the Lappia arena had not caused any material damage to the arena<sup>36</sup>. An article describing a protest calling for the closure of the borders was soon followed by an editorial written by another journalist that criticized the views of the

<sup>32</sup> ”Kemissä ja Torniossa osoitetaan mieltä. Mielenosoitus kommentoi ”hallitsematonta maahanmuuttoa”. Vastamielenosoituksesta ei ollut tietoa torstaina”, PS 18.9.2015.

<sup>33</sup> ”Pakolaiset. Pakkohon näitä ihmisiä on auttaa”, PS 19.9.2015.

<sup>34</sup> ”Pakolaisvirta pani rajakuviot uusiksi”, PS 21.9.2015; ”Pakolaisvirta on saatava hallintaan”, PS 22.9.2015; ”Länsiraja ei enää vuoda”, PS 23.9.2015; ”Tornioon noin 450 turvapaikanhakijaa”, PS 24.9.2015; ”Järjestelykeskus vetää satoja rekisteriin”, PS 25.9.2015.

<sup>35</sup> ”Pakolainen lihottaa kassaa”, PS 26.9.2015; ”Bussikuski tietää vain ilmansuunnan”, PS 26.9.2015

<sup>36</sup> ”Hätämajoitus ei pilannut Lappia-hallia lainkaan”, PS 1.10.2015.

protestors<sup>37</sup>. Sympathy towards the asylum seekers was also expressed by reporting that the Finnish Red Cross had organized a course for volunteers who wished to assist the asylum seekers. After a short break, once again a photo including the smiling faces of ordinary people was published along with the news<sup>38</sup>.

In the third phase of coverage the PS combined the themes and tones of the two previous phases in a certain way and gave plenty of space to all kinds of opinions and news topics. Psychologically, this can be interpreted as an understandable plateau phase, after the initial positive attitudes were followed by some degree of shock and counter-reactions. The more settled situation was likely a relief, in which it was possible to contribute to the development of events in a positive direction through one's own actions. The positive perspectives found concerning asylum seekers were perhaps intended to encourage readers to trust that the overall situation remained under control and that asylum seekers should be seen more as an opportunity and a resource than as a threat and cause of stress.

The period from mid-October until the end of November can be considered a fourth phase of coverage in the Pohjolan Sanomat. It is characterized by the commonplace aspects of the topic and increased criticism towards the authorities. At the end of October and November the number of asylum seekers slowly declined, although there was still a noticeable amount compared to the beginning of the year and previous years. The newspaper reported on the arrivals infrequently, mostly when their numbers had been exceptionally large or small on a given day<sup>39</sup>. The news value of the topic began to gradually weaken and, as stated above, was reflected in a clear decrease in the amount of coverage towards the end of November. There were a few cases of human smuggling and these were discussed in the news section of the newspaper, but the space given to them was quite small<sup>40</sup>. Details about the operations of the Tornio registration center were provided only rarely. News about the center was most prominent on October 16, when a representative of Frontex, the European border security agency, visited the center. The PS presumed that due to the success of "Tornio residents", of which they felt some pride, the operations of the Tornio center would become a model for Greece and Italy<sup>41</sup>.

A new feature in the writing of PS journalists during the last phase was that in a series of published articles they more or less took a critical stance towards the

<sup>37</sup> "Rajat kiinni -liike: "Nyt riittää, rajat kiinni!""", PS 3.10.2015; "Kommentti: Rajat kiinni -meuhkaajat eivät ymmärrä historiaa", PS 3.10.2015.

<sup>38</sup> "Halu auttaa toi vapaaehtoiseksi", PS 6.10.2015.

<sup>39</sup> "Rajalla hiljainen maanantai – poliisi ei tee johtopäätöksiä tulijamäärien vähenemisestä", PS 3.11.2015; "Torniossa 300–400 tulijan päivätahti", PS 12.11.2015.

<sup>40</sup> "Laittoman maahantulon järjestäjä kiinni", PS 10.10.2015; "Venekyydissä ehkä laittomia maahantulijoita Tornioon", PS 13.10.2015; "Ainakin yhtä epäillään ihmissalakuljetuksesta", PS 5.11.2015.

<sup>41</sup> "Tornion järjestelykeskuksesta mallia Kreikkaan ja Italiaan", PS 16.10.2015.

actions of authorities. These articles wondered why there were so many uniformed police officers, border guards, soldiers and private security personnel on the streets of Tornio, although there were few asylum seekers to be seen. Editor Juhani Tapio directly expressed his opinion that Tornio reminded him of a police state due to this, and he criticized the “climate of fear” that the presence of authorities in his opinion was apparently maintaining<sup>42</sup>. Border guards and customs officials were also criticized for slowing down border traffic and it was given to understand that they did their work too thoroughly. It was even suggested that customs inspectors were guilty of illegalities in controlling the identity of those crossing with freight, or erecting “illegal” speed bumps on border crossings<sup>43</sup>. The fact that officers were operating in accordance with instructions given by the Ministry of the Interior was ironized as “Petteri’s prank” (in reference to Minister of the Interior Petteri Orpo) and as a dubious “invention” of the Ministry of the Interior<sup>44</sup>. The photos were once again synchronized with the text so that the customs officers appeared to be harsh and even angry<sup>45</sup>.

It could be that the editorial staff were annoyed that the previously completely open border had now become a controlled crossing point, where people could no longer come and go at will. Even a small delay in traffic could feel like a lost right, which annoyed local residents. It remained unclear whether the writers intended that the asylum seekers as well should have free reign in crossing the border. In discussing the “uncontrolled tide of refugees” a few weeks earlier, at least no stance in support of this opinion was publicized. Denouncing the presence of authorities as maintaining a “climate of fear” or as some kind of overreaction to the asylum seekers issue can to some extent be considered contradictory as on average, according to studies, Finns have a particularly high trust in the police and defense forces<sup>46</sup>. Taking this into consideration, the presence of authorities is not likely to create fear and insecurity, but the effect is probably the opposite. It is possible that motivations for these criticisms from the editorial staff of the PS were due to their personal opinions or journalistic ideals to act as the “watchdogs of power”<sup>47</sup>. Journalists who have internalized this ideal have a duty find commentary in regards to the actions of authorities and others in power and present them as the opposite to the presumed interests of “ordinary people”.

The writing of Pohjolan Sanomat in its entirety closely resembles development that was typical of the rest of Europe at that time. Kaleva’s news material also

<sup>42</sup> ”Onko Tornio turvallisin kaupunki?”, PS 12.10.2015.

<sup>43</sup> ”Ihan väärä virkamies”, PS 7.11.2015; ”Tulli rakensi laittomia hidasteita”, PS 7.11.2015.

<sup>44</sup> ”Petterin kepponen”, PS 7.11.2015.

<sup>45</sup> ”Petterin kepponen”, PS 7.11.2015; ”Ihan väärä virkamies”, PS 7.11.2015.

<sup>46</sup> *Suomalaisten luottamus poliisiin yhä vahva*. [http://intermin.fi/artikkeli/-/asset\\_publisher/suomalaisten-luottamus-poliisiin-yha-vah-1](http://intermin.fi/artikkeli/-/asset_publisher/suomalaisten-luottamus-poliisiin-yha-vah-1)

<sup>47</sup> Juholin & Kuutti 203, 14; Street 2001, 185–187.

changed in the same manner during the summer and autumn<sup>48</sup>. At the outset, there was an emphasis on the humanitarian aspects, and as a result, a great deal of news space was given to a representation of several relief organizations. As the number of asylum seekers grew greater, the majority of the papers began to emphasize the threats and disorder-related aspects. After the authorities gained better control of the situation, the media's picture of the situation re-balanced, and by the late autumn, the matter was being considered from many perspectives. Toward the end of that year, the media reviewed what had happened during the autumn, the newspapers criticized the authorities for their inability to solve the problems and also for their sometimes negative attitude toward the asylum seekers.<sup>49</sup>

### **The Ilta-Sanomat: A threatening human flood and a drama full of surprises**

In comparison to the Pohjolan Sanomat, the image portrayed by the Ilta-Sanomat of events in Tornio was rather one-sided. During the four-month period, the amount of news and short articles written by journalists equaled almost as much as in the Pohjolan Sanomat, but it repeated a few core themes. These core themes portrayed a threat and dramatic turns in events, on the basis of which the IS built a certain kind of narrative as long as materials were found regarding the topic. Two perspectives apparent in the coverage of the PS were completely nonexistent in the coverage of the IS: the sympathy shown to asylum seekers and those assisting them, as well as criticism towards the authorities. Thus, the editorial staff of the IS was firmly on the side of the authorities, and supported efforts through which the "threat" posed by asylum seekers was brought under control. The editorial staff also did not see that it was necessary to provide balance in the news by portraying the positive effects that asylum seekers had brought to the local economy or by giving a voice to those individuals who generally regarded immigration as a positive issue requiring a friendly reception.

On the last day of August events in Tornio exceeded the news threshold of the IS, when the newspaper mentioned that many locals in Tornio were shaken over a protest in which an unknown person had raised the swastika on the flagpole of the reception center sometime during the night<sup>50</sup>. Except two short references to the existence of the reception center at the beginning of August, the interest of the IS increased from September 13 onwards, with regular news reports continuing until the end of September. The number of asylum seekers in Tornio had risen dramatically and the editorial staff of the IS portrayed a very dramatic situation for readers: "The

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<sup>48</sup> Kuikka 2016, 55–58.

<sup>49</sup> Greussing & Boomgaarden 2017, 1751–1753; Chouliaraki & Zaborowski 2017, 613–635.

<sup>50</sup> "Useat vastaanottokeskukset joutuneet iskujen kohteeksi – tässä viimeisin tempaus", IS 31.8.2015.

number of asylum seekers in Tornio exploded on Sunday: You could say there is chaos here”<sup>51</sup>. In regards to the same situation, the editorial staff of the PS had stated that chaos was feared, but had not occurred. The editorial staff of the IS wanted to interpret the situation differently and spoke of an “explosion”, which further dramatized the situation. In the following days articles in the IS repeated the terms “exceptional situation”, “flood,” and “uncontrolled situation”<sup>52</sup>.

Throughout its coverage, the headlines and style of writing in the *Ilta-Sanomat* were more shocking than in the *Pohjolan Sanomat*, and were likely meant precisely to startle readers. Naturally, all of the publications aimed to attract the attention of their readers, but it was more common of the IS than for example the PS to emphasize the sudden, spontaneous, radical and threatening nature of events in headlines. One typical example is an article published on September 22, which discussed the start of operations of the Tornio registration center. The headline read: “It begins today: Historical change on Finland’s borders”<sup>53</sup>. It is true of course that no such center had existed before, however police stations and reception centers had handled the same tasks, so this change was relatively modest. Another example of this obviously deliberate dramatization and creation of a threatening impression occurred on September 20, when a news article was titled as follows: “79 asylum sleepers slept in the Tornio soccer arena – A worst case scenario was feared”<sup>54</sup>. Readers were able to imagine what this “worst case scenario” might be, and the exceptionally frightening aspect of the situation was likely the basis for this impression. At the end of the article, it turned out that a “worst-case scenario” would have been a failure to find accommodation for the asylum seekers and their being left out in the rain for the night, as buses were not leaving from Tornio due to a strike within transport companies. It may be a matter of taste whether this was a flat anticlimax to a tale of horror or a joyful relief for readers. In any case, simply by reading the headline one could obtain a substantially different impression of the situation in Tornio.

The IS provided two slightly differing impressions of the actions of authorities and those of Finnish state leadership in regards to the situation in Tornio. On one hand, the paper took a positive stance towards statements made by Prime Minister Sipilä, Minister of the Interior Orpo and Head Secretary of the Minister of the

<sup>51</sup> ”Turvapaikanhakijoiden määrä räjähti sunnuntaina Torniossa: ”Voi sanoa, että täällä on nyt kaaos””, IS 13.9.2015.

<sup>52</sup> ”Rajavalvontaa tehostetaan Torniossa – Sipilä: ”Tilanne otetaan nyt haltuun”, IS 18.9.2015; ”Orpo: Pohjois-Suomeen tehostettu rajavalvonta”, IS 14.9.2015; ”Torniossa varaudutaan ainakin 800 turvapaikanhakijan majoittamiseen”, IS 18.9.2015.

<sup>53</sup> ”Tänään se alkaa: Historiallinen muutos Suomen rajoilla”, IS 22.9.2015.

<sup>54</sup> ”Tornion palloiluhallissa nukkui 79 turvapaikanhakijaa – ”Oli pelko pahimmasta mahdollisesta tilanteesta””, IS 20.9.2015.



interior Nerg that “the situation would be taken in hand”<sup>55</sup>. At the same time, the newspaper portrayed the authorities as acting efficiently in controlling “the flood of refugees”, and among other actions, “catching human smugglers red-handed”. The use of hunting terminology is likely not a coincidence here. On the other hand, the paper stated that authorities were working at the limits of their capabilities and the police forces had had to “resort” to using policing students and conscripts to meet their demands in Tornio<sup>56</sup>. Thus, according to perceptions created by the IS, even the police felt insecure, a situation which was unlikely to inspire the confidence of ordinary citizens. The reference to students and conscripts created the impression that even the last, poorly trained reserves had had to be dragged out to shore up the situation. However, in reality the situation was not as dramatic as the headlines implied, as this was a case of normal administrative assistance, and recent graduates of the police force and the military police force were particularly suitable and appropriate additional resources.

The photos provided with the text in the IS emphasized the large number of asylum seekers and a threatening “flood”. The arrivals were invariably pictured from a distance, as groups that were crowding buses or buildings. The pictures were almost always taken diagonally from behind, which further emphasized the somewhat frightening anonymity and non-individuality of the crowd<sup>57</sup>. The pictures taken of the authorities were similar: soldiers, customs officers, border guards, police officers and security personnel were pictured in groups, facing away from the camera and performing their duties, in most cases directing the “flow” of refugees in the right direction<sup>58</sup>.

Media researchers have found that from an international and comparative perspective, it is especially typical of tabloids to construct so-called moral panics or media crises. In other words, tabloids are happy to portray issues so that they appear as crises, although in other media interpretations are more moderate. Secondly, tabloids link certain elements to crises, on the basis of which important values or interests appear to be threatened. This in turn can communicate a certain kind of panic or at least serious concern to the target audience that their normal lifestyle and customary social structures are threatened. The authorities are then in turn forced to respond to the situation by making statements and taking concrete measures, so that

<sup>55</sup> ”Rajavalvontaa tehostetaan Torniossa – Sipilä: ”Tilanne otetaan nyt haltuun”, IS 18.9.2015; ”Orpo: Pohjois-Suomeen tehostettu rajavalvonta”, IS 14.9.2015; ”Sisäministeriö: Suomi tiukentaa linjaansa rajoilla”, IS 19.9.2015.

<sup>56</sup> ”Poliisihallitus turvautuu poliisiopiskelijoihin Tornion pakolaistilanteen hoitamisessa”, IS 22.9.2015; ”Pakolaisten salakuljettaja jäi verekseltään kiinni rajalla Torniossa”, IS 23.9.2015.

<sup>57</sup> IS 13.9.2015; IS 17.9.2015; IS 18.9.2015; IS 20.9.2015.

<sup>58</sup> IS 20.9.2015; IS 22.9.2015; IS 23.9.2015; IS 27.9.2015.



this “panic” is calmed<sup>59</sup>. The coverage of the *Ilta-Sanomat* regarding events in Tornio in the autumn of 2015 fits this formula particularly well. However, the coverage of the IS was to some degree more moderate than, for example, that of the British tabloids in a similar situation, as it did not directly indicate which essential values were justifiably threatened by this panic. The references to chaos and an uncontrolled situation were on a more general level. The IS also did not show outright racism towards asylum seekers or otherwise clearly question their human dignity. In this sense, instead of an popular tabloid, the IS can be considered a “serious tabloid” in regards to its coverage of events in Tornio, as for example Haavisto<sup>60</sup> has classified it in her own research.

Not as much focus or change in tone is apparent in the IS as in the PS, but the coverage of the IS can be roughly divided into two phases. The first phase extended from the second week of September until the end of September, when articles and photos relating to Tornio were published on a daily basis and their content was similar to that described above. At the end of September when the situation in Tornio began to calm down, the flow of arrivals and issues related to their control began to lose their news value. However, the editorial staff of the newspaper continued to build on the drama and took advantage of small changes and details that could be mentioned about Tornio. This kind of narrative including small surprises and twists in events continued until the latter half of November, when the coverage became random, averaging about one news item per week.

One typical case of this narrative involving small surprises and twists was for example September 29, when, according to the news headline, “The police discovered a new phenomenon on the border in Tornio”. It became clear in the news article that a small group of asylum seekers had arrived in Tornio by taxi instead of by bus<sup>61</sup>. Another typical example is from the beginning of October: “A large change occurred in the tide of refugees – the police list the causes”. The “large” change was that in the previous days, the proportion of families among asylum seekers had increased and the number of individual applicants had decreased correspondingly<sup>62</sup>. A substantial amount of similar news pieces that overdramatized events in comparison to the actual reality were published. Sometimes the “unexpected turn” meant that there had been more Afghan asylum seekers than Iraqis on a given day, or on some days there

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<sup>59</sup> Stanley Cohen, *Folk Devils and Moral Panics. The Creation of the Mods and Rockers*. MacGibbon & Kee, London 1972, 9–19; Horsti 2005, 119–136.

<sup>60</sup> Haavisto 2011, 149–150.

<sup>61</sup> ”Poliisi havaitsi uuden ilmiön rajalla Torniossa”, IS 29.9.2015.

<sup>62</sup> ”Pakolaisten virtaan tuli iso muutos Torniossa – poliisi listaa syyt”, IS 8.10.2015.

had been less arrivals than usual<sup>63</sup>. In any case, what the articles had in common was the fact that the editorial staff chose relatively minor issues relating to the situation in Tornio and portrayed them as significant and dramatic, particularly in headlines. In general, the attitude of the IS closely resembled the way how the Slovak Roma immigrants were dealt with in the Finnish media in 2002<sup>64</sup>.

The writing of *Ilta-Sanomat*, including the publication of images, was almost identical to that seen in the tabloid press elsewhere in Europe in the autumn of 2015. The core of the writing and its tone was the “threat”, and the search for drama, therefore, became one of the most important basic elements of that coverage.<sup>65</sup> The message of *Ilta-Sanomat* reminded one of those comments being posted on nationally focused social media channels across Europe. Similar rhetoric was also used by nationalist politicians in their public speeches in several European countries.<sup>66</sup>

### **The Helsingin Sanomat: Accepting asylum seekers families is not a problem**

Like the *Ilta-Sanomat*, the portrayal of events in Tornio as relayed by the *Helsingin Sanomat* was rather one dimensional, and there are no distinct phases of development in regards to the content or tone. When events in Tornio exceeded the news threshold of the HS in mid-September, its coverage remained fairly substantial for four weeks until mid-October. After this, with the exception of a few references to the reception center or registration center, attention was no longer paid to Tornio. In its style and tone, the coverage of the HS was almost a perfect opposite of the IS: it avoided any kind of drama or the depiction of a threat. The HS also differed the most from a Finnish perspective or that of authorities and provided space for presenting the viewpoints of asylum seekers.

The HS reported on the increasing number of asylum seekers in mid-September and stated that the authorities were busy registering the newcomers. The establishment of the registration center and its purpose in facilitating arrangements was discussed. At the same time, arrangements for accommodations were reported to readers and mention was made that there was a slight shortage of suitable accommodations not only in Tornio but elsewhere as well. The overall tone of coverage was very

<sup>63</sup> ”Tilanne on nyt hyvin kriittinen – Turvapaikanhakijoille ei ole enää yhtään vastaanottoaikkaa”, IS 24.9.2015; ”Poliisi: Maahanmuuttoviraston ilmoitus aiheutti erikoista yöllistä liikettä rajalla”, IS 1.10.2015; ”Poliisi tiedottaa: Torniossa oli erikoinen yö – ei yhtä ainutta turvapaikanhakijaa”, IS 7.10.2015; ”Yllättävä käänne turvapaikanhakijoissa: enemmistö Tornioon saapuneista ei tullutkaan Irakista”, IS 31.10.2015.

<sup>64</sup> Horsti 2005, 178–181.

<sup>65</sup> Greussing & Boomgaarden 2017, 1749–1752; Fotopoulos & Kaimaklioti 2016, 273–275.

<sup>66</sup> Krzyzanowski 2018, 92–93; Boukala & Dimitrakopoulou 2018, 186–196.

businesslike and created a peaceful perception. There was congestion at times, but everything was controlled<sup>67</sup>. The smooth operations were emphasized by providing quotes from interviews given by bus drivers and ticket sellers at stations, who asserted that no chaos or disorganization was present<sup>68</sup>. In the coverage of the HS, Tornio was a fairly relaxed “stopping point”, from where asylum seekers continued their journey to other parts of Finland.

When the photos published by the HS are compared to those of the IS, one could conclude that they are from two different locations. The pictures of the HS almost exclusively depicted families, women and children, despite the fact that well over 80% of the arrivals were men (including young males) traveling on their own<sup>69</sup>. The few pictures depicting men named the individuals<sup>70</sup>, unlike the anonymous groups shown in the IS. The photos were taken from the front, mostly as close-ups, and they mostly depicted smiling people. There were no photos of Finnish authorities, which were prevalent in the PS and particularly in the IS. Police, soldiers and other authorities were mentioned in passing, but their activities were discussed very little. A few times, the actions of authorities or other Finns became apparent in interviews with asylum seekers, when some details in arrangements had given rise to confusion in the interviews. A more restrictive policy in Finland was also reported to have resulted in the return of some asylum seekers to Sweden<sup>71</sup>.

The organization of human smuggling was mentioned a few times, but this was not discussed from a perspective of illegal immigration but as problem for asylum seekers themselves. The smugglers had cheated the newcomers, as they did not know that the border crossing was hassle-free and had paid the criminals in vain<sup>72</sup>. The demonstration demanding the closure of the border was reported on once, and the message of the demonstrators was diluted in two ways. Two quotations from protesters in Tornio were chosen, in which the one referred to “the government’s irresponsible foolishness,” without specifying what the individual in question meant. In the other quotation the interviewee agreed that there were people in need among the newcomers. Additionally, the same news story explained that a great number of

<sup>67</sup> ”Kukaan ei halunnut jäädä Haaparantaan”, HS 11.9.2015; ”Turvapaikanhakijoiden järjestelykeskus aukeaa”, HS 15.9.2015; ”Järjestelykeskus perustetaan vanhaan lukioon Torniossa”, HS 16.9.2015; ”Järjestelykeskus avautuu Torniossa”, HS 18.9.2015.

<sup>68</sup> ”Tornioista tuli välipysäkki turvapaikanhakijoille”, HS 18.9.2015; ”Arabian kieli täytti matkakeskuksen Torniossa”, HS 18.9.2015.

<sup>69</sup> *Turvapaikanhakijat 1.1.–31.12.2015*. Maahanmuuttovirasto. [http://www.migri.fi/tietoa\\_virastosta/tilastot/turvapaikka\\_ ja\\_pakolaistilastot](http://www.migri.fi/tietoa_virastosta/tilastot/turvapaikka_ ja_pakolaistilastot)

<sup>70</sup> HS 11.9.2015; HS 17.9.2015; HS 20.9.2015; HS 21.9.2015; HS 22.9.2015; HS 23.9.2015; HS 26.9.2015; HS 27.9.2015.

<sup>71</sup> ”Suomi kiristää valvontaa rajoilla”, HS 20.9.2015; ”Tieto tarkastuksista rajalla käänsi osan tulojoista”, HS 20.9.2015; ””Suomessa parhaat poliisit, tahdon jäädä tänne””, HS 21.9.2015.

<sup>72</sup> ”Torniossa jäi kiinni epäiltyjä ihmislakuljettajia”, HS 21.9.2015; ”Saapuneiden turvapaikanhakijoiden määrä laski”, HS 29.9.2015.

people had come to watch the protest due to the fact that “according to estimates, an exceptional number of police units would be on the scene”. Therefore, according to the interpretations of the editorial staff of the HS, the message of the demonstration did not interest people, but they had come to watch the police cars. At the end of the article there was an additional statement that in Helsinki, the far-right had protested the same issue<sup>73</sup>. Although those protesting in Tornio were not flatly referred to as belonging to the far-right, the implication was present. Moreover, the issue was in alignment with the HS’s tradition to not give much publicity to xenophobic groups<sup>74</sup>.

Overall, the HS took the side of asylum seekers and avoided describing the issue in a way that would have presented the asylum seekers as a problem despite their large numbers. The stance chosen by the HS was summed up in the editorial written by Editor-in-chief Antero Mukka on September 17. Mukka, to whom the Tornio area is familiar and who has earlier worked at the Pohjolan Sanomat, described in his editorial how in the Tornio region the border crossing is regarded as the world’s most open one and how relaxed and uncomplicated interactions at the border have been. The previous practices were seen as the ideal in the text, and the strengthening of border control and the establishment of the “so-called registration center” (Mukka’s phrase) were sad developments that hampered good everyday life. The writer also pointed out how as a child his father had escaped from the war to Sweden, when “those behind the border opened their doors, gave assistance and were humane to each other. This was just done”<sup>75</sup>. The message was clear: the asylum seekers were exactly the same types of people as the Finns, they should be welcomed and assisted, and this was the obligation of every ordinary citizen. In their coverage concerning Tornio, the editorial staff of the HS attempted to promote such perceptions and attitudes among readers and get them to act accordingly.

The writings of Helsingin Sanomat emphasized exactly the same features as those presented in other European countries in the newspapers that were favorable to asylum seekers. In the news, those media channels that offered a positive picture of the situation presented plenty of information on assisting asylum seekers and their rights. Also, the visual material that supported the writings of Helsingin Sanomat was similar in opinion to the European counterparts seen in autumn 2015.<sup>76</sup> The same is true if the writings of Helsingin Sanomat is compared to Kaleva (or Pohjolan Sanomat) at the earliest stage.<sup>77</sup>

<sup>73</sup> ”Mielenosoittajat vaativat rajoja kiinni pakolaisilta”, HS 20.9.2015.

<sup>74</sup> Haavisto 2011, 182. Compared with the situation in 1985–1993, the HS’s overall attitude toward immigrants has changed remarkably during the 2000s; see Pietikäinen 2000, 278–279.

<sup>75</sup> ”Haminan rauhasta Euroopan ideaan”, HS 17.9.2015.

<sup>76</sup> Greussing & Boomgaard 2017, 1757; Fotopoulos & Kaimaklioti 2016, 276; Szczepanik 2016, 29.

<sup>77</sup> Kuikka 2016, 44–45.

## Conclusions

All in all, in comparing the coverage of the Pohjolan Sanomat, the Ilta-Sanomat and the Helsingin Sanomat in regards to events in Tornio in the autumn of 2015, it can be concluded that on the basis of these papers there were three contradictory “truths” and interpretations regarding the nature of events. What they had in common was the fact that they all noted the dramatic increase in the number of asylum seekers in Tornio during September and they followed the situation quite actively as it developed. A few basic facts were also discussed in all the papers: these covered the operations of the reception center, the establishment of the registration center and through it the better organization of receiving arrivals, the acquisition of new accommodation facilities, additional resources received by the authorities, and the arrests of a few human smugglers. There was no consensus among the papers in regards to what these meant, what their weight was in terms of the overall picture, and in which interpretive framework they belonged.

The main message of the Ilta-Sanomat was - as is typical of the sensation-seeking manner of tabloids - that in regards to the arrival of the asylum seekers, there was at times a chaotic human flood that had become disordered, and that the authorities were having great difficulties in controlling it. Tornio was the focal point of a serious crisis, where dramatic, surprising events were constantly occurring. A perspective was taken that emphasized the authorities and the great challenges of their work, and ultimately it was suggested that the threat posed by uncontrolled immigration concerned the whole of Finnish society. In practice, the Helsingin Sanomat presented an interpretation that was virtually the opposite in every respect to its readers, by choosing liberal and humane values and promoting multiculturalism through the position it had chosen. To the Helsingin Sanomat, asylum seekers were not a threat, but a group of people that were just like Finns, and it was the duty of everyone to assist them according to their ability. Although the reception of the asylum seekers required additional work, according to the paper the situation was well under control at all times, and there was no reason for anyone to be concerned about the issue.

The focus in the coverage of the Pohjolan Sanomat varied depending on how well the situation appeared to be under control at any given time. From the initial unconcerned attitudes there was a shift towards emphasizing threats, when the number of arrivals increased sufficiently. When the situation calmed down, there was a return to a position from where the perceived positives and negatives were both discussed substantially. Apparently, the Pohjolan Sanomat sought to serve its readers by more or less providing equal space to a wide range of viewpoints, and in addition it was evident that during the most eventful phase of the crisis the attitudes of the editorial board were not fully established, but opinions could change quickly. However, for most of the time the editorial staff of the paper appear to have attempted to promote a positive attitude towards the newcomers. This was reflected in the fact that while

plenty of negative phenomena appeared in news material while reporting on the course of events, the articles written by the editorial staff emphasized a desire to assist the asylum seekers. Thus, the basic position taken by the paper was somewhere between the other two papers, but was closer to the stance of the *Helsingin Sanomat* than that of the *Ilta-Sanomat*.

When comparing Finnish newspapers to newspapers in other European countries, it can be said that no national features could be observed in Finland. The quantitative analysis of the writing in Finnish newspapers produced a similar distribution as that found elsewhere. The same themes, terms, and manner of writing were repeated in the same way as seen in other countries during the same time. The difference between the tabloid newspapers and other newspapers was also the same in terms of international comparison. The key conclusion here is that the strong growth in the number of asylum seekers in the autumn of 2015 attracted very similar reactions from Finnish journalists as it did elsewhere. It can thus be concluded that the Finnish society or Finnish mentality did not offer any essential elements that would have distinguished Finland from the other European countries.

The decisive factor was how the asylum seekers were seen in principle. Everywhere in Europe, the main division was based on the positive–negative axis. In the former case, asylum seekers were seen as victims and thus were defined as “good refugees”. The Europeans should be solidly with them, and everyone was obliged to help them as much as possible. If there were problems in the fall of 2015, they were not caused by the asylum seekers. They were simply caused by the European authorities and other parties who refused to provide sufficient assistance. In the latter case, the entrants were called “bad refugees” who caused disorder and threatened normal life and public safety. This massive flood of anonymous people had to be slowed and dammed up before it was too late. Between these extremes there were certain views that had features that related to both viewpoints. By analyzing the three Finnish newspapers studied in this article, we were able to identify examples of all three typical cases that occurred in this particular European media debate during the designated specific time period.